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WEEKLY REPORT



THE SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

24 November 1965

**INTELLIGENCE AND REPORTING SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE INTERAGENCY
VIETNAM COORDINATING COMMITTEE**

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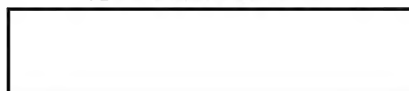
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THE SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM
(18 November - 24 November 1965)

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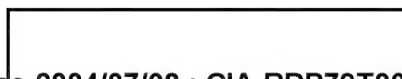
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(The Weekly Report on the Situation in South
Vietnam is based on contributions from CIA,
DIA, and INR; it is edited and published by
CIA without final coordination.)

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THE WEEK IN PERSPECTIVE

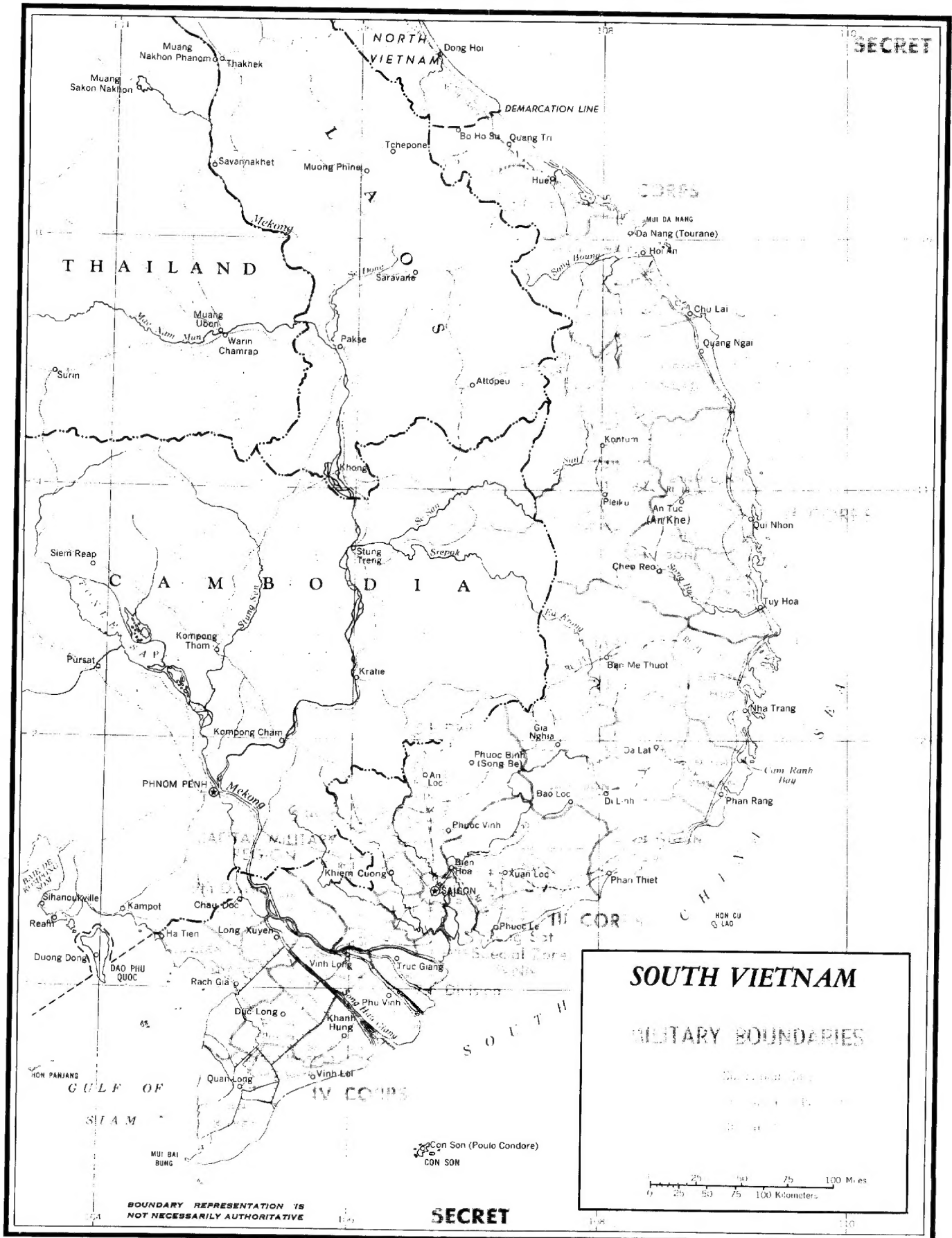
A marked increase in the intensity of the fighting, including a number of large-scale Viet Cong attacks in scattered areas of the country, made last week the bloodiest of the war to date. Many of the casualties resulted from the heavy fighting between US troops and an estimated three to four North Vietnamese regiments in southwestern Pleiku Province, but heavy Viet Cong activity elsewhere indicated a determined effort to maintain pressure on the population.

The political situation was disturbed only by a strong public statement of opposition to the Ky government on the part of the small Saigon Students Union, although there were further indications of growing political ambitions on the part of I Corps commander General Thi. The Ky government, meanwhile, appears to be turning its attention toward long-range development of political institutions intended to satisfy public desires for a more representative and legally-based government.

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I. THE SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

A. POLITICAL SITUATION

1. Saigon's military government last week turned its attention to the problems of establishing long-range political institutions and government legitimacy, an issue receiving increasing press and political attention. [REDACTED]

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2. According to Premier Ky, current government thinking envisages that the constitution, providing for a strong executive with a fixed tenure, might hopefully be submitted to a public referendum sometime before the end of 1966. Some type of deliberative body or senate, in which the various religious, regional, ethnic, political, and labor groups would be represented, is also under consideration. Ky told Ambassador Lodge that some form of popular elections might be possible during 1967, depending upon the evolution of public political consciousness and the degree of security prevailing at that time. Ky observed that, at the present time, elections free of Communist intimidation could probably be held in no more than one-fourth of South Vietnam's villages.

3. On 19 November, leaders of the Saigon Students Union (SSU) launched an unusually sharp public attack on the Ky government, charging that it had failed in its programs to date and that it lacked public support. SSU President Tran Quang Tri, acting as the group's spokesman, declared that the Ky government must go, and that the meeting marked the opening of a struggle between students and government. He also spoke critically of the adverse economic effects of the US military buildup. Although the meeting was allegedly sponsored by the SSU and Hue University students, no representatives from Hue were present; a spokesman from Catholic-oriented Dalat University, however, endorsed the SSU stand. The US Embassy believes that Tri and the SSU have only limited influence among Saigon University students. It suspects, however,

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that Tri, who in the past has supported former premier Tran Van Huong, may have been prodded by certain southern regionalist politicians, as well as by disaffected Catholic circles that have been publicly silent since issuing a critical communiqué two weeks ago.

4. The embassy also reports that during the week the government confiscated issues of the anti-American, neutralist-leaning journal Sinh Vien Hué, published weekly by the militant Buddhist-oriented "student struggle movement" in Hué. At the same time and apparently in an effort to strike a balance, the government also seized issues of an aggressive Saigon weekly, Dai Doan Ket, an organ of Catholic refugee priest Hoang Quynh.

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[REDACTED]

6. Although the silencing of Sinh Vien Hué, if permanent, would remove the most bitter source of attacks on the US except for Viet Cong/Liberation Front

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propaganda, indications of uneasiness over the growing American role are manifest among all shades of the Saigon press and other articulate groups. In addition to the recent SSU criticism of economic disruption resulting from the large American presence, [REDACTED]

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7. A recent survey by the US Embassy's provincial reporting staff has concluded that there is increasing public anxiety over the conduct of US and South Vietnamese military operations. The survey, although necessarily drawing largely on attitudes in provincial and district towns and adjacent areas, notes that expressions of concern are still largely restricted to a small circle of politically conscious intellectual, religious, and social leaders. There appears to be widespread appreciation, particularly among local officialdom, of US efforts to spare the civilian populace, although some officials report considerable confusion among local inhabitants over rapidly changing developments, and others fear a serious disruption of the existing social fabric. Although peasant attitudes could not be firmly assessed, the embassy reporters were unable to discover any basis for assuming that rural refugees--many of them fleeing airstrikes or the threat of airstrikes--were blaming the Viet Cong for their plight or otherwise becoming more committed to the Saigon regime. The US Embassy concludes that while no groundswell of antipathy toward the US or Saigon can be detected as a result of the intensified military pace, the Viet Cong may be expected to exploit any critical public mood.

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Economic Situation

9. Rice prices continued to decline, but general retail prices leveled off after a two-week downward trend. However, there was a rise in prices of US-financed imports, notably construction materials of iron and steel. In view of the increasingly short supply of cement in Saigon, Minister of Economy Ton, at the insistence of Saigon's mayor, has approached US officials to see what can be done.

10. The future role of Ton and the other economic leaders in the GVN is apparently in some doubt, according to US Embassy reports. This is due to their lack of forceful leadership in formulating policy and in making a strong case to Premier Ky, as well as to intense attacks from "out" political groups. Ky and his close military advisers do not generally comprehend the economic situation or its possible remedies. Even if he were to be educated to accept the policies of Ton and the others, Ky may feel obliged to remove the economic minister in response to political pressure.

11. The rice situation continues to be encouraging. Delta deliveries in the past two weeks have averaged 1,243 metric tons (mt) daily, up from 1,011 mt in October. Saigon stocks are now at 40,211 mt, with other known stocks totalling over 31,000 mt. It is generally believed, however, that the early delta crop is poor and that the continuing inflow of rice to Saigon probably represents "disharding" of last year's main crop. In the meantime, the Ministry of Economy has announced that rice prices set for government purchase contracts would be maintained throughout the year. Asked to suggest contract prices, rice merchants have mentioned VN\$675-700 per 100 kilogram for No 1/25 percent broken. It is apparent that this suggestion reflects the continuing decline in rice prices, which have been under VN\$700 for over a month. This optimistic

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situation is dimmed somewhat by increased military activity in rice areas, boding ill for production and harvesting in the central provinces. The entrance of PAVN units is also adding to the Viet Cong impact on rice production.

12. In an effort to control the flow of dollars into Viet Cong hands, stricter measures are being enforced concerning the purchase of postal money orders and the importation of dollars by US military personnel returning from rest and recreation leaves. Vietnamese officials are also taking steps to increase currency control for other foreigners entering the country.

13. The Vietnamese Maritime Union strike ended after two weeks as several hundred workers were granted an across-the-board 1,500-piaster monthly increase.

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B. MILITARY SITUATION

1. Communist activity increased again during the week, but allied forces inflicted significant defeats upon Viet Cong/PAVN units. The major US-PAVN confrontation in southwest Pleiku Province highlighted the period; a subsequent series of large-scale Viet Cong/PAVN attacks occurred along the eastern coast near the Quang Ngai, Qui Nhon, and Tuy Hoa enclaves. The Viet Cong appear determined to maintain pressure on the population while increasing military activity.

2. Statistically, the period from 14 to 20 November showed several increases. The incident total was 881, the highest since the record 975 in mid-September; incident totals have now been above 700 for seven consecutive weeks. Attacks increased to 14 against seven for the previous week, terrorist acts rose to 505 compared to 420, and sabotage incidents climbed to 146 from 90. Communist weapons losses reached an all-time high of 1,161 from the previous week's 343, and known casualties also reached a record peak of 2,398, including 2,262 killed and 136 captured. Allied totals also increased: combined casualties were at a new high of 1,987, including 1,270 GVN, 716 US, and one ROK; weapons losses rose to 351 from 158.

3. The number of GVN/allied large-unit actions showed a drop from 100 to 93, and small-unit actions also decreased; resulting US contacts outnumbered GVN contacts (100 versus 67) for the fifth consecutive week. US combat deaths increased to 240 from the previous week's high of 86, and US wounded also reached a new record figure, 470, compared to 230 last week. The previous weekly record was 283 during August. GVN armed forces casualty totals--357 killed, 807 wounded, and 106 missing or captured--also increased, from 165, 286, and 56, respectively.

GVN/Allied Activities

4. Allied forces achieved their greatest success of the war during Operation SILVER BAYONET in southwest Pleiku Province. In addition to the seizure of key terrain features from which operations can be continued into the Chu Phong base area,

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casualty totals as of 20 November show a major allied victory over North Vietnamese forces. Confirmed PAVN/VC losses were 1,429 killed and 20 captured; US casualties were 215 killed and 358 wounded; GVN elements lost seven killed and 50 wounded.

5. Artillery, naval gunfire, close air and B-52 strikes, and helicopter support all proved invaluable throughout the week. SILVER BAYONET was supported by 17,241 rounds of 105 mm artillery, 354 close air support sorties, ten B-52 strikes, and 3,745 helicopter-fired aerial rockets. US naval gunfire and airstrikes were effective during the series of enemy multibattalion attacks that began on 21 November in the eastern coastal area.

6. No significant naval developments were reported during the week. A total of 4,920 junks and 17,921 persons were searched by Vietnamese Navy elements and no sea infiltration attempts were disclosed. Continuing bad weather in the northern area is affecting sea force performance, but this is partially offset by the steady showing of coastal force elements. The number of junks on patrol, averaging 202 per day, is indicative of the steady improvement.

Communist Activities

7. Communist military activity was highlighted by the week-long action west of Plei Me in Pleiku Province, triggered on 14 November when PAVN/VC elements attacked a company of the US 1st Cavalry Division in a helicopter landing zone. From this beginning, the action developed into a full-scale battle between at least three and possibly four PAVN regiments and elements of the 2d and 3d brigades, 1st Cavalry Division. Four GVN airborne battalions entered the action on 18 November.

8. Heavy casualties were suffered by the Viet Cong in other significant actions with government forces at Tan Hiep airfield in Dinh Tuong Province, at Hiep Duc district headquarters in Quang Tin Province, and in Chuong Thien Province where an estimated Viet Cong battalion was surrounded.

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9. The Viet Cong attack at Hiep Duc on 16 November was the most significant action in the I Corps Tactical Zone (CTZ). An estimated battalion of the 1st Viet Cong Regiment overran the town and destroyed the headquarters defended by two regional force companies. A two-battalion reaction force aided by close air support, however, reoccupied the battle site on 18 November at an enemy cost of 363 killed and 86 weapons captured. Government losses were 35 killed and 74 wounded. Seventy civilians were also killed, 40 as a result of the first Viet Cong assault. Other activity consisted of minings and harassing fire, the latter particularly against GVN forces in the Ba Long Valley.

10. The week-long series of PAVN attacks and counterattacks in the battle area southwest of Plei Me in Pleiku Province, continued despite severe casualties, pointed up a determined Communist effort to defend this location. Elements of the PAVN 66th, Song Lam, and 32d regiments, and possibly the 250th as well, were engaged in the fighting. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] indicates that a Viet Cong local force battalion was attached to the 66th Regiment. According to COMUSMACV, Communist strategy in this area probably involves a continuing aggressive defense until their position becomes untenable. At this point, Communist forces would be expected to move into Cambodia or adjacent areas within South Vietnam. Small-unit actions accounted for the remaining activity in II Corps Tactical Zone.

11. An estimated Viet Cong battalion attacked a GVN Marine company five kilometers south of Saigon on the outskirts of Cholon, the largest action so close to Saigon in some time. Other activity consisted of harassing fire directed primarily at allied troop units. Sabotage was concentrated along Route 13 and its feeder routes, and was probably designed to impede friendly forces operating in Binh Duong Province.

12. [REDACTED] lost 111 killed and two captured on 16 November when six battalions of the GVN 21st Division surrounded an estimated Viet Cong battalion. Again, effective artillery and close

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air support were credited with inflicting heavy casualties. GVN casualties were reported as eight killed and 39 wounded. There were four other small-scale attacks throughout the IV CTZ.

13. On 18 November, a multibattalion Viet Cong force overran an airstrip defended by a GVN Ranger battalion at Tan Hiep in Dinh Tuong Province, IV CTZ. A GVN counterattack restored the airstrip to friendly hands, but not before government forces suffered 46 killed, including 13 civilians, 55 wounded, and four aircraft and five trucks destroyed. Viet Cong losses at the airfield were 43 killed and two captured. An immediate search-and-destroy operation was launched by elements of the GVN 7th Division along the most likely Viet Cong avenue of withdrawal. A day-long pursuit, supported by artillery and air strikes, resulted in an additional 156 Viet Cong killed and five captured. GVN forces lost 11 killed and 53 wounded.

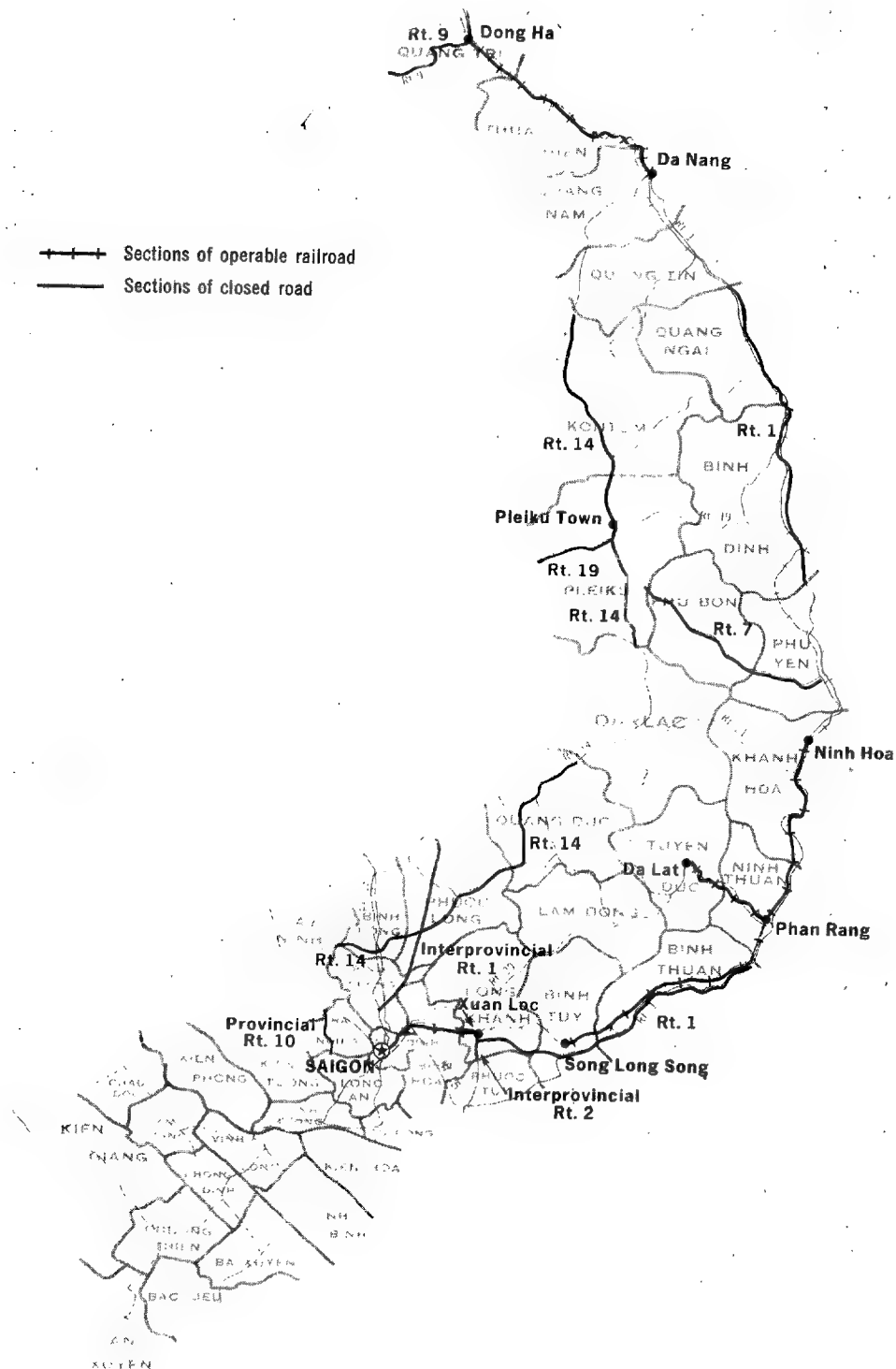
14. A series of Communist multibattalion attacks along the eastern coast began on 21 November, as operations elsewhere in this area by government and US forces continued without significant contact. A regiment-sized Viet Cong force attacked a GVN Ranger battalion south of Quang Ngai city on 22 November, but was driven off by US naval gun fire and air strikes after sustaining heavy losses. According to a MACV source, Viet Cong attacks were timed between air strikes.

15. A Communist regiment-sized force reportedly isolated Tuy An in Phu Yen Province on 23 November. This action began the previous night when an estimated battalion--reported as Viet Cong but possibly North Vietnamese--attacked a company of government troops guarding a bridge 15 miles north of Tuy Hoa. The Communist force, described by a US observer as wearing North Vietnamese-type long-sleeved khaki shirts and camouflaged helmets, next ambushed an armored relief column, and then moved south to attack the district town. At least five government positions were neutralized and friendly losses reportedly heavy, despite effective use of US naval gunfire and air strikes.

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CURRENT STATUS OF MAJOR TRANSPORTATION ROUTES AND THE COASTAL RAILROAD



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16. National Route 1 is closed in Thua Thien, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, Binh Thuan, Long Khanh, and Binh Tuy provinces. Route 9 is closed in Quang Tri Province. Route 14 is closed in Kontum, Pleiku, Quang Duc, Phuoc Long, and Binh Long provinces. Route 19 is closed west of Pleiku city. Route 7 is closed in Phu Bon and Phu Yen provinces. Inter-provincial Route 1 is closed in Binh Duong and Phuoc Long provinces. Interprovincial Route 2 is closed in Long Khanh Province. Provincial Route 10 is closed in Hau Nghia Province. The national railroad is closed from Xuan Loc, Long Khanh Province to Song Long Song, Binh Tuy Province; and between Ninh Hoa, Khanh Hoa Province, and the DMZ.

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C. RURAL CONSTRUCTION

1. The scheduled series of meetings between Rural Construction Minister General Nguyen Duc Thang, corps and division commanders, and province chiefs concerning the preparation of FY 1966 provincial rural construction plans and budgets was completed last week. General Thang, apparently highly satisfied with these meetings, is now confident that the approved plans and budgets for rural construction activities will be ready by the 1 January deadline. USOM officials still have some complex questions regarding the reconstruction plans for the coming year, but they feel that any attempt to make major revisions in policy or plans at this stage would make it impossible to meet the target date of 1 January.

2. On 17 November, Premier Ky presented land titles to a representative group of ten farmers occupying state lands in Tay Ninh Province. Land has been surveyed and titles prepared for a total of 172 farmers now occupying 56 hectares in Tay Ninh Province. This action follows a ceremony at Dalat in Tuyen Duc Province in September, which inaugurated the implementation of the government's policy of distributing state lands to the actual tillers. The GVN estimates that there are a total of 180,000 squatters occupying 300,000 hectares of state land throughout the country.

3. Other aspects of the GVN land policy include granting of full titles to farmers buying land under Ordinance 57, which reduced landlord holdings to a maximum of 100 hectares by expropriation, and the subdivision and sale of former French-owned rice lands now held by the GVN. About a month ago, distribution of former French-owned lands was initiated in Ninh Thuan Province with a ceremonial presentation by Chief of State Thieu. No new titles have been issued under this program, but some farmers have provisional titles to their land and the period of payment has been extended from six to 12 years.

4. A substantial increase in the number of Chieu Hoi returnees was reported during the past week. A total of 1,027 returned to government control, more

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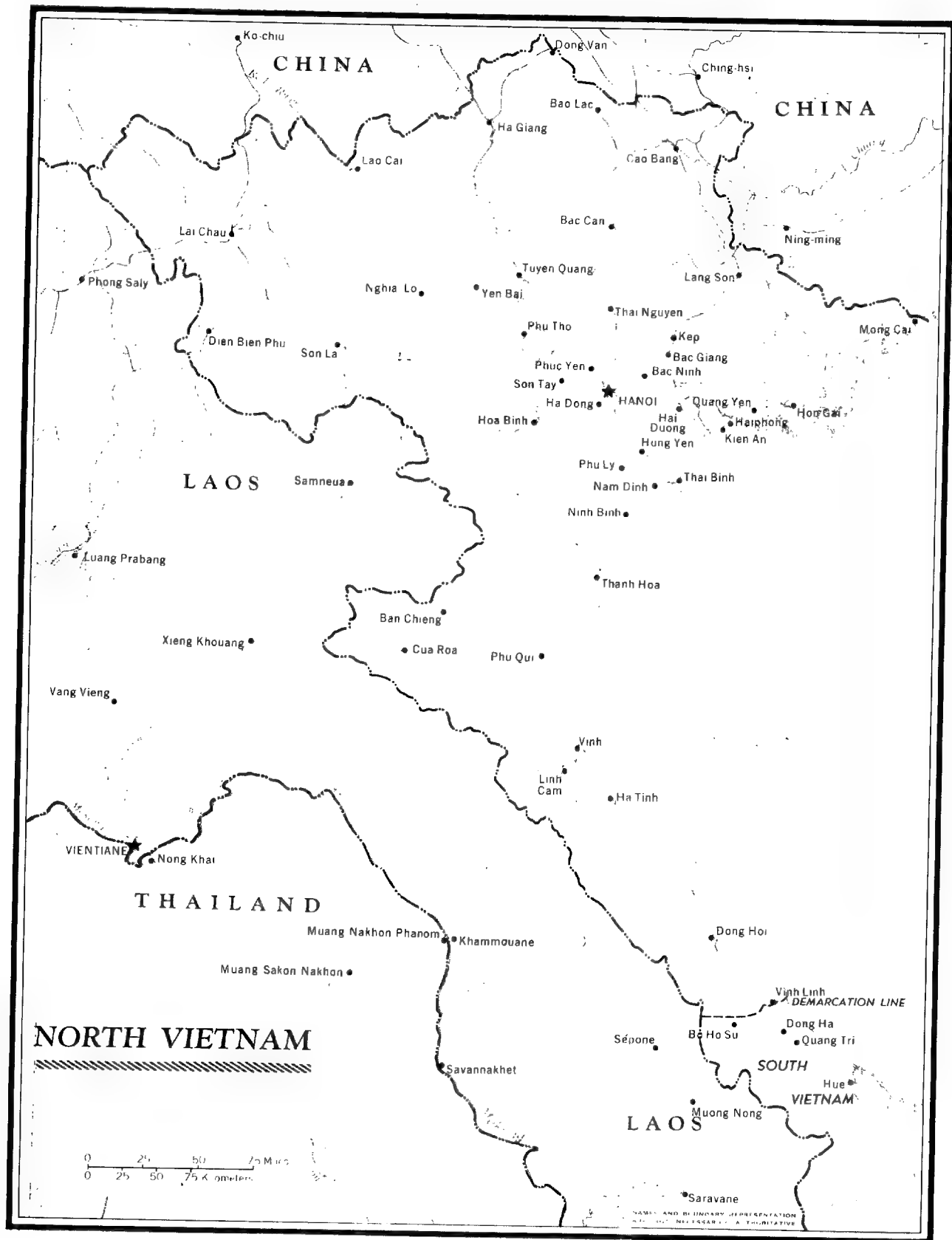
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than double the previous week's total of 438. Military returnees constituted the largest single category with 493 returning to government control; last week military returnees totalled 217. Political cadres who rallied to the government side numbered 115 this week, compared to only 43 the previous week. Six men in the deserter/draft dodger category returned to GVN control as well as 413 civilians; for the previous week, returnees in these categories numbered one and 177, respectively.

5. The US Embassy is interested in having the GVN combine the psychological warfare and Chieu Hoi functions into one ministry. The subject has been broached to Premier Ky and he seems to approve of the concept.

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II. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE BLOC

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2. To underscore the "militant bonds" that exist between the people in both zones of Vietnam, Hanoi this week continued to give red carpet treatment and extensive propaganda play to the delegation of "military heroes" of the Liberation Front currently in the DRV. The delegation was feted at one ceremony after another, and was greeted by senior politburo figures including Ho Chi Minh. The extensive publicity surrounding the delegation's visit and the emphasis in regime propaganda on the solidarity that exists among all Vietnamese in their determination to defeat the "US aggressors," suggests that Hanoi is using the visit to demonstrate publicly its faith in the fighting ability of the Viet Cong and to strengthen the insurgents' determination to continue the war.

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4. While the North Vietnamese have continued to insist that any settlement of the war will be achieved on Communist terms, Hanoi has been careful to maintain a position in which the DRV can still appear reasonable in its demands. An example of this has been the regime's frequent willingness to host non-Communist delegations that come to Hanoi to discuss the fighting. The latest instance is the visit of the former mayor of Florence, Italy, Georgio La Pira, who has just returned from talks with the North Vietnamese leadership. Hanoi probably told him, as it has others in the past, that the US must stop the bombings in the North and declare a unilateral ceasefire in the South.

5. Moscow's statements in recent weeks have not gone beyond standard condemnations of US actions in Vietnam, and continue to avoid any mention of a negotiated settlement of the war. The Soviet stance reflects the USSR's apparent resignation to what it anticipates will be a prolonged struggle in Vietnam, and underscores its continuing determination to avoid an open divergence from Hanoi's stand.

6. Although the USSR also continues its policy of restraint in answering Chinese attacks against Soviet policy in Vietnam, it has apparently decided to reply--indirectly--to Peking's 11 November indictment of US-Soviet collusion over Vietnam. A 20 November Neues Deutschland article, openly critical of Peking's anti-Soviet tactics with regard to the Vietnamese conflict, is aimed at convincing Communist audiences that Peking's intransigence toward the Soviet Union is having broad consequences for Hanoi's position in the war. TASS promptly replayed the portions of the article that cited Chinese obstruction of Soviet military aid to the DRV as evidence that Peking is "putting ideological differences above the struggle against imperialism."

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III. THIRD COUNTRY DEVELOPMENTS

A. CAMBODIA

1. A PAVN prisoner recently stated during a GVN-sponsored press conference in Saigon that his group had infiltrated South Vietnam through Cambodia, and that local militia provided the group with supplies, particularly rice. A preliminary interrogation report, so far the only report on this development from the US Mission, briefly mentions that the prisoner entered through Cambodia but contains no indication of local assistance. Moreover, American newsmen who attended the press conference have confidentially reported that the prisoner's statements did not sound convincing.

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[REDACTED] report that on the basis of available evidence there is no significant Viet Cong use of Cambodian territory. Moreover, they feel that no significant use of Cambodian territory could be made by the Viet Cong without the connivance of the government in Phnom Penh, and they see no evidence that the Cambodian Government is considering such connivance. On the contrary, they report, trends in the Cambodian leadership appear to be away from close association with the Communists and toward improved relations with free world nations. (The

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C. Foreign Office Matters

Vu Van Mau, GVN Ambassador to London, resigned as a result of a disagreement with the Foreign Office. The point at issue ostensibly was whether or not the GVN would pay for Mau's travel to Saigon to permit him to participate in the annual examination of candidates by the law faculty of the University of Saigon. (Mau was once dean of the law faculty.) The US Embassy in Saigon reports that in view of earlier reports that the GVN was considering replacing Mau, the Ky government may have seized on the travel request as a pretext for forcing his resignation. There is no indication as yet of a replacement for Mau, but the GVN reportedly is considering a realignment of the non-resident ambassadorial representation in northern and western Europe, primarily in order to strengthen representation in the Scandinavian countries.

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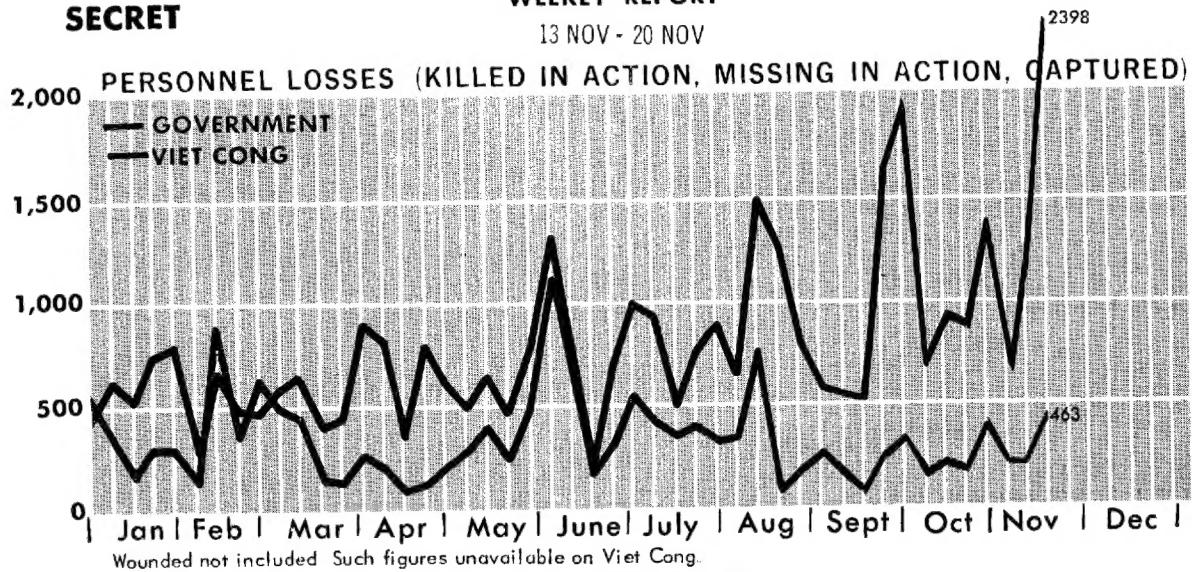
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SOUTH VIETNAM BATTLE STATISTICS, 1965

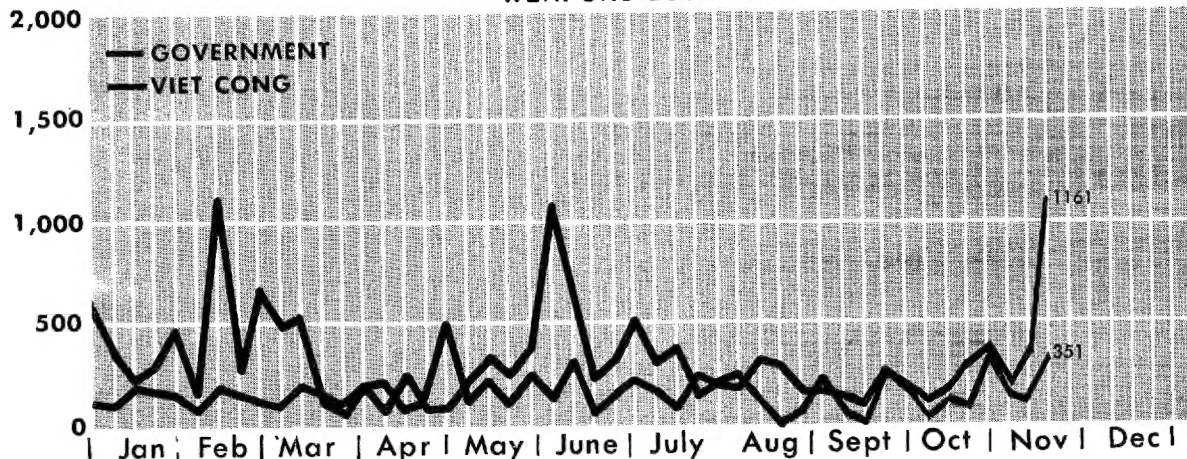
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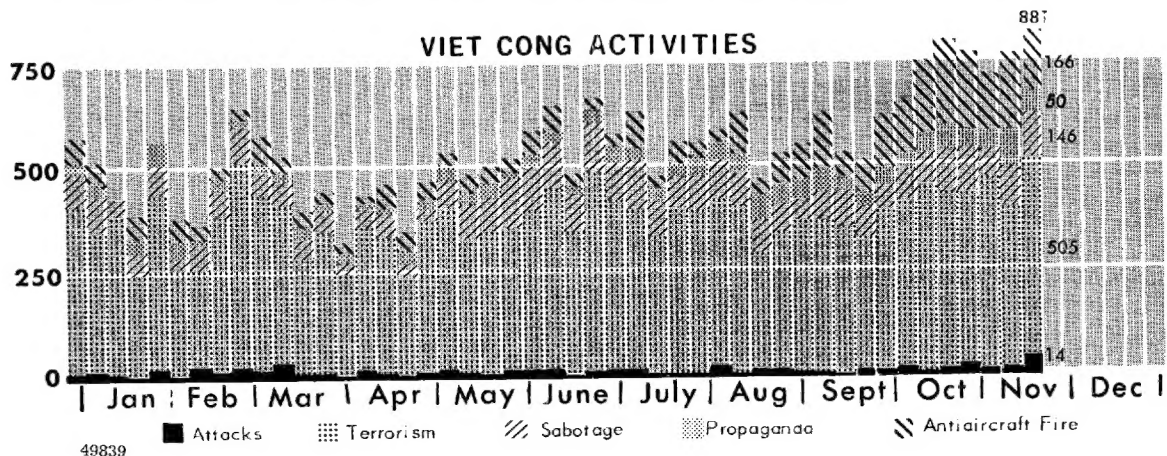
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WEAPONS LOSSES



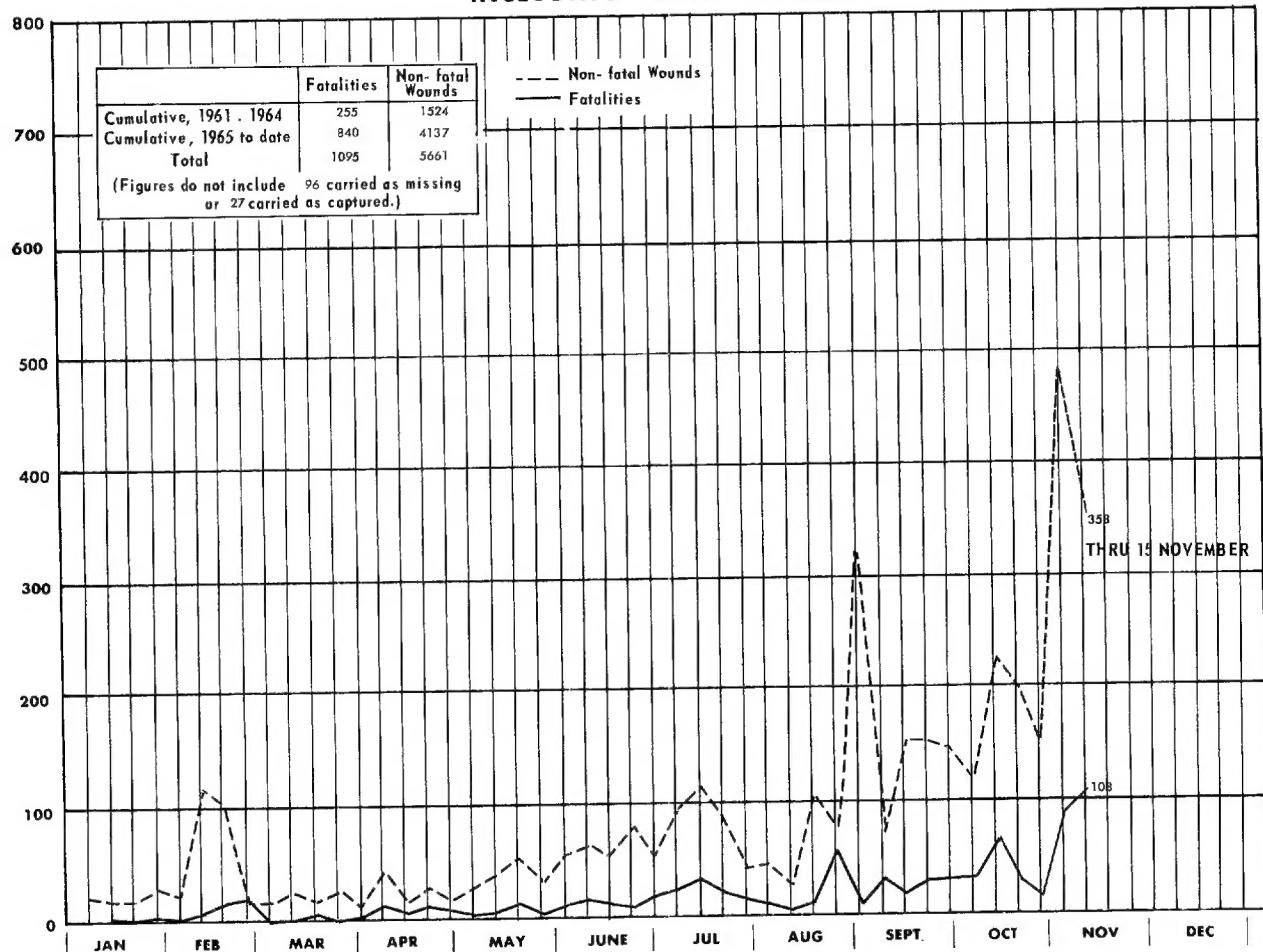
VIET CONG ACTIVITIES



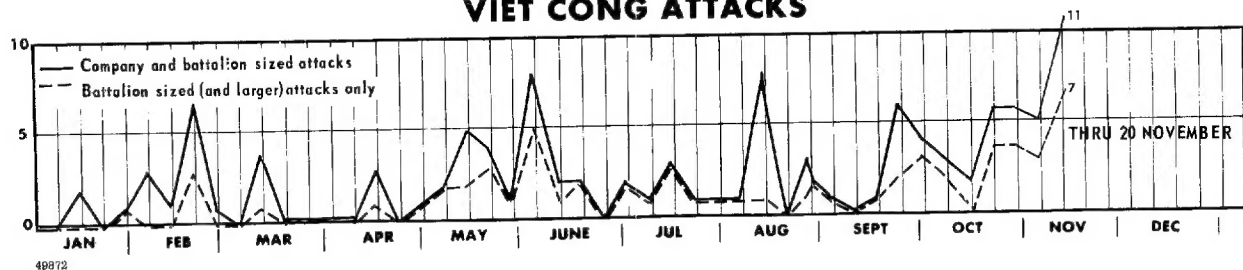
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US COMBAT CASUALTIES IN VIETNAM INCLUDING NORTH VIETNAM



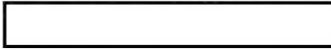
VIET CONG ATTACKS



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